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Potential Impacts of Extended Advance Voting on Voter Turnout

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Note to the Reader

This study has been commissioned by Elections Canada to look at the potential impacts of extended voting opportunities proposed by Bill C-55, An Act to amend the *Canada Elections Act* (expanded voting opportunities) and to make a consequential amendment to the *Referendum Act* (39th Parliament, 1st Session). The observations and conclusions are those of the authors.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify the likely impact of Bill C-55 (Extended Voting Opportunities; 39th Parliament, 1st Session) on voter turnout. Our analysis considers existing literature on the effects of non-election day voting opportunities on turnout. It then presents new cross-national evidence on the relationship between such voting opportunities and voter turnout. Using data from the Canadian Election Study, it next considers the profile of advance voters in Canada. Finally, we examine whether the increased advance voting in the last federal election was related to increased turnout.

The study shows the following:

1. There is relatively clear evidence that when voting is more convenient, a greater proportion of the population turns out to vote. However, the effect is modest at best.

2. Cross-national research on the effects of advance voting, holiday voting, and a two-day voting period has yielded inconsistent and ambiguous results.

3. Our own re-examination of cross-national evidence shows that the provision of advance, postal or proxy voting and the presence of two consecutive regular days of voting are all positively associated with turnout, but the correlations are not very robust.

4. Research on the consequences of postal or advance voting in the United States usually indicates positive effects, but these effects tend to be limited and restricted to certain subgroups of the electorate.

5. Advance voters in Canada are typically older than those who vote on election day or choose to abstain. The decision to vote in advance appears to be motivated by an engagement in politics and by contact with political parties.

6. Overall voter turnout in Canada is increased by advance voting. The provision of more advance vote opportunities should thus increase overall turnout.

We conclude that Bill C-55 is likely to increase voter turnout in Canada, but the magnitude of this effect is likely to be small.

Introduction

Bill C-55 (Extended Voting Opportunities), which was introduced in May 2007, would increase the number of advance polling days from three to five. However, because the fifth day is the Sunday immediately preceding election day, and because the same polling stations would be used on that day, this effectively establishes two days of regular voting. The implication of this measure would be that one of the voting days would be a day of rest.

This study explores the potential impacts on voter turnout of extended advance voting,[1] of having two similar consecutive voting days instead of one, and of giving voters the option of voting on a Sunday.

We first present an overview of the measures that exist in Canada and abroad with respect to advance voting and election days. We then review extant research on the topic. We look at cross-national studies that examine whether administrative measures designed to facilitate voting, especially advance voting and/or extension of regular voting over more than one day, have a significant impact on turnout, and whether it makes a difference if voting day occurs on a holiday or a day of rest. We then review a number of studies done in the United States about the effects of measures aimed at facilitating the vote. Because the objective of Bill C-55 is to make it easier to vote, we also review studies that ascertain whether "convenience" increases turnout.

Finally, we present some new empirical evidence. We revisit previous cross-national work that we conducted for Elections Canada in 2003 to ascertain more precisely the consequences of advance voting, holiday voting, and number of voting days.

Subsequently, using the 2006 Canadian Election Study, we examine the profile of advance voters and compare it with that of election-day voters and abstainers. And looking at the official results in the electoral districts, we test the hypothesis that increased advance voting contributes to a higher turnout.

[1] The term "advance voting" as used in this report refers to the possibility for electors to vote in advance in specially designed polling places (before the election day). It does not refer to other possible voting methods (such as proxy or postal voting).

A Comparative Overview

Several countries facilitate voting by providing more voting opportunities, but no single provision is followed by all countries. The use of alternative voting methods varies from one country to another, and the expanded voting time frame of Bill C-55 would make Canada a unique case in the world. To our knowledge, only Swedish legislative electoral law provides a similar combination of voting opportunities.[2]

An important number of democratic countries in the world practice advance voting. In the sample of 61 democratic countries examined in the present study, 20 use advance voting. Only three (Estonia, Canada and Sweden) provide this opportunity to all electors without special cause (Massicotte et al. 2003). Other countries offer this option only to electors who are unable to vote on election day, for reasons such as their employment situation or a physical disability. The table "Polling Day and Advance Voting in Selected Countries" (see Appendix A) indicates that among the 18 countries included in the analysis that allow advance voting, only eight offer advance voting on a Sunday as an option. Furthermore, Sweden is the only country that allows advance voting on the day immediately preceding election day, which is held on Sunday. In other countries, the usual practice is to establish a minimum number of days for advance voting prior to election day.

Another practice is holding election day on a day of rest or a holiday. In the sample of 61 democratic countries studied by Blais et al. (2003), 73 percent hold elections on a day of rest (either on the weekend or on a public holiday specially called for the election). Another study reports that 58 percent (56 out of 96) of surveyed countries (including democratic as well as non-democratic ones) hold elections on Sunday, and in 70 percent of them, voting takes place on Saturday or Sunday (The Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec 2004).

Arguments both for and against holding the election on a day of rest are multiple. Proponents contend that voting on a day of rest is easier, because electors have more time to go to the polls than on a weekday, when most people have to work. Moreover, schools – which are frequently used for polling stations – are readily available on days of rest or holidays, while on weekdays they can sometimes be used only if schoolchildren are granted a holiday (Massicotte et al. 2003). The Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec (2004) has recommended Sunday voting for several reasons: easier recruitment of polling day personnel, easier access to schools, elimination of inconvenience for parents whose children are granted a holiday if polling day is a weekday, elimination of difficulties for some employers to grant their employees time off to allow them to vote, and increased access for older electors and electors with special needs. Opponents object that people may prefer to take advantage of a day off for other activities and may not bother to vote. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Lortie Commission) (1991) noted that a majority of party activists as well as of the general population appeared to

[2] In Sweden, advance voting starts 18 days before election day and goes on continuously until election day. At least one voting place in each municipality is also open for advance voting on election day. This is a service for voters who cannot go to their polling station during regular voting hours on election day and who have not been able to vote during the previous 18 days.

dislike the idea of Sunday voting. Therefore, they recommended keeping Monday as election day for federal elections.

One solution – and this is the one proposed in Bill C-55 – is to have two similar consecutive voting days, one on the Sunday immediately preceding election day and one on a weekday, for instance on a Monday. The assumption is that some people prefer voting on a day of rest while others prefer a weekday, and that making the two options available is bound to help.

Having two consecutive days of regular voting is a very rare provision in electoral legislations. Multiplying the number of polling days increases the cost of elections. An overwhelming majority of democratic countries hold their legislative elections on a single day; very few countries hold elections on two consecutive days. As far as we know, those that do are the Czech Republic (Friday and Saturday), Namibia (either Tuesday and Wednesday or Wednesday and Thursday) and Zimbabwe[3] (Saturday and Sunday). Slovakia practised two consecutive days of regular voting in 1994 and 1998, but the electoral law was amended in 2004, and since then only one voting day is allowed. However, it is interesting to note that in the Czech Republic, no other alternative voting methods are allowed. Likewise, no advance, proxy or postal voting was allowed in Slovakia when the country practised two consecutive voting days[4] (in Namibia, apart from polling day, only advance voting is allowed, and that is restricted to some groups, and in Zimbabwe, only postal voting is practised).

Finally, it should be noted that no jurisdiction in Canada has recently used Sunday voting or two consecutive voting days. Sunday voting was experimented with once in Quebec, in 1966. Federal and provincial electoral laws are clear: election day cannot be held on a holiday. Advance voting is universally accepted by all Canadian jurisdictions, but almost none allows advance voting procedures on the day immediately preceding election day. The exception is Newfoundland and Labrador where advance voting may be held on one or more of the seven days immediately preceding the ordinary polling day. However, advance voting has never been held there on the day immediately preceding polling day. Advance voting may be held on Sunday in Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan (see Appendix B).

[3] It should be noted, however that, according to Freedom House, Zimbabwe is not a democratic country.

[4] Since the 2004 electoral law reform in Slovakia, postal voting is allowed.

Literature Review

The question is whether turnout is likely to increase if there is greater opportunity for advance voting and if Canadians have two similar polling days instead of one, especially if the first day is a Sunday.

The first response that we can give with some confidence is this: this is very unlikely to reduce turnout. The logic is simple: the easier it is to vote, the more likely people are to vote. The more difficult questions pertain to the probable magnitude of the impact (is it going to boost turnout a lot or just a little?) and to the comparative effects of various methods through which electoral participation can be facilitated.

Before reviewing the cross-national literature, it is useful to examine how responsive people are to the cost (or difficulty) of voting. Using individual survey data, Blais (2000) measures costs through three questions: how much time respondents think it will take them to vote, how easy or difficult they feel is it to go and vote, and how easy or difficult they find it to get information and decide how to vote. Blais finds that the perceived cost of voting is very small. He also shows that costs have a statistically significant effect on turnout: the easier it is to vote, the lower the propensity to abstain. But the impact is weak. He concludes that "marginal increases in (costs) reduce the propensity to vote only marginally" (Blais 2000, 91). His results suggest that measures designed to facilitate the vote would help, but only a little.

Let us now consider the more typical cross-national evidence. A series of studies focuses directly on administrative measures for facilitating the vote; their goal is to determine whether, everything else being equal, turnout tends to be higher in countries that have adopted such measures.

Franklin has most extensively examined the impact of voting facilities. In a first piece (Franklin 1996), he reports a positive effect for the presence of such facilities[5] as well as for Sunday voting; the estimated impact, four and six percentage points respectively, is substantial. Franklin also finds a counterintuitive negative effect of the number of voting days.[6] In a second study published six years later, Franklin (2002) again finds that these two factors give a substantial boost (six percentage points) to turnout. Number of voting days is not included this time.

[5] Franklin refers to "postal voting," but the data he uses (Katz 1997, Table 13.2) concern postal voting, advanced voting and other "special" provisions. The term "voting facilities" would better reflect what is being measured.

[6] We suspect that this counterintuitive finding is due to the fact that India, which has a very low turnout, is construed as having five voting days. The fact is that there are different voting days for different regions of the country, but an elector may vote only on a given day. Therefore, India should be considered as having one voting day.

The third and last study is Franklin's book (2004), where the emphasis is on explaining turnout *variation* from the previous election. Franklin finds no significant effect this time for either voting facilities[7] or weekend voting.

In short, Franklin's initial results suggested relatively strong effects for voting facilities as well as for Sunday voting, but his later work reports no significant impact.

Norris (2002) also looks at the impact of voting facilities on turnout. Her analysis covers a wider range of countries, including non-democratic ones. She finds a positive effect for rest-day voting, a negative impact for proxy voting and the number of days that polling stations are open, and no effect for other special voting facilities.

Blais et al. (2003) conducted a study covering 151 elections in 61 democratic elections for Elections Canada. The authors examine the impact of holiday voting and "ease of voting." The latter indicates whether it is possible to vote by mail, in advance or by proxy. It corresponds to the proportion of options available in a given country (the variable equals 0.66 in Canada, where mail and advance voting exist but there is no proxy voting). The study reports no significant effect for holiday voting, but a relatively strong impact for ease of voting. Everything else being equal, turnout would be 11 points higher in a country with all three options (Sweden is the only such case), compared with countries with none available (these countries being mostly in South America).

Finally, Rose (2004) examines turnout in the (then) 15 European Union member countries in both national (1945–2002) and European Parliament (1979–1999) elections. He looks at the effect of holding the election on a day of rest and finds a strong positive impact (4 percentage points for national elections and 11 points for the European Parliament elections).

The findings of studies based on cross-national comparisons are not very consistent. In the case of voting facilities, Franklin's initial studies and Blais et al. report that they boost turnout, while Franklin (in his most recent research) and Norris find no effect. In the case of Sunday or holiday voting, Franklin (early work), Norris and Rose indicate that it contributes to a higher turnout, while Franklin's most recent book and Blais et al. report no impact. As for two regular days of voting, some studies suggest a negative effect, which does not seem very credible. Such ambiguous findings make it difficult to reach definitive conclusions. They suggest, at the very least, that these administrative measures are unlikely to have a big impact. At the same time, there is rather strong evidence that convenience helps a little, and so it seems plausible that measures that make it easier for voters to vote at a more convenient time should slightly increase turnout.

Another series of studies have looked at the consequences of advance or postal voting facilities adopted in certain American states. Three studies (Karp and Banducci 2000, Berinski, Burns and Traugott 2001, Gronke and Miller 2007) ascertain the impact of postal voting in the United States, specifically in the state of Oregon, where all elections are now conducted by postal voting

[7] Franklin is now referring to "absentee" voting, but the data still cover postal and advanced voting plus other special provisions.

alone. Gronke and Miller also study the state of Washington, where postal voting is allowed in some counties but not others. The common conclusion is that the introduction of postal voting increased turnout by making it easier for people who generally, but not always, vote to cast ballots. However, it did little to cause habitual non-voters to cast ballots. The effect, then, is positive but modest. Gronke and Miller report similar results from Washington state, where counties that conduct elections by mail experience an average turnout 4.5 percentage points higher than counties that do not.

Oliver (1996) examines the effects of the provision of advance voting opportunities on turnout. He finds that advance voting is higher in states with liberal voting laws, but only if parties actively mobilize citizens to take advantage of these increased opportunities to vote. A recent study by Gronke et al. (n.d.) looks at the consequences of advance voting in 50 states over a 24-year period. Their study reports a positive effect of about five percentage points for postal voting, but no significant effect for in-person early voting. Again, the general theme is that these measures increase turnout only among specific subgroups or under some conditions, and so the overall impact is limited.

Scholars have also analyzed the impact of changes in American electoral administration since the introduction of the *Help American Vote Act* in 2002. Mycoff et al. (2007) find that there is no relationship between the strictness of identification requirements and turnout at either the aggregate or the individual level.

There are also a number of interesting studies on the relationship between convenience and voting. For example, scholars have studied the impact of weather on turnout. The most systematic study was published by Gomez et al. (2007). They examine turnout in over 3,000 counties for each American presidential election from 1948 to 2000, and they relate it to estimates of rain and snow on the day of the election. The authors show a statistically significant effect for both rain and snow. The impact, however, is quite small. They find that one additional inch of rain decreases turnout by almost one percentage point; the effect of one additional inch of snow is almost 0.5 percentage point. A similar result is reported by Ben Lakhdar and Dubois (2006), who look at the effect of the climate in 43 departments for five French legislative elections.

Finally, there is some research on the impact of distance from polling stations on turnout. Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) examine turnout in 363 precincts from three suburban Maryland counties in the 2000 presidential election. They relate turnout to distance between polling sites and voter district centroids. They find a statistically significant effect, controlling for a host of other factors: "a five mile increase in accessibility increases turnout by an average of 1.74 percent (sic)."

A second study by Dyck and Gimpel (2005) is even more interesting, because it is based on individual-level data. The authors look at distance between voter residences, their precinct and nearest early voting sites in Clark County, Nevada, for the 2002 mid-term election. They estimate the impact of distance on the propensity to abstain or to vote at the precinct, early, or by mail. They find that distance matters. But the precise effects are somewhat surprising: the greater the distance from precinct site, the greater the propensity to vote by mail, and the greater the

distance from early voting sites, the greater the propensity to vote at the precinct. Distance from voting sites primarily affects which form of voting is chosen (precinct, early or mail). There is an impact on overall turnout, but it is modest; living one standard deviation beyond mean distance from a precinct site (about 1.75 miles) increases abstention by 1.3 percentage points.

Finally, a recent study by Baker (2007) examined the effect of the consolidation of polling stations in Ohio and Kansas. While she expected the consolidation of polling stations to reduce turnout, she found no effect.

Research on the impact of weather and distance thus comes up with consistent findings. Nicer weather and shorter distance from the polling stations contributes to a higher turnout. But the effect appears to be small. Taken together, all these findings suggest that measures that make it easier to vote can be expected to increase voter turnout, but only slightly.

The Impact of Advance Voting, Holiday Voting and Two Consecutive Regular Days of Voting on Turnout: A Comparative Re-examination

In a study prepared for Elections Canada, Blais et al. (2003) examined why voter turnout is higher (or lower) in some countries than in others. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of certain institutional variables on electoral participation, controlling for other important socio-economic and geographic factors. In particular, the authors examined the impact of holiday voting and administrative measures making voting easier. However, they did not directly address the issue of advance voting and number of voting days.

We begin by describing the initial study's methodology and main findings. Then we re-analyze the initial data set taken from Blais et al. (2003), using the same methodology, while improving some measures in order to directly address the questions highlighted above.

The study covered a total of 151 elections, held in 61 democratic countries, from 1990 until 2001 (for more details, see Blais et al. 2003).[8] Three sets of variables that may affect turnout were distinguished: the socio-economic and geographic environment and two types of institutional factors (macro-institutional and electoral administration).

The authors proceeded in three stages. They started with the first set of variables and examined which socio-economic and geographic factors influence turnout. They then explored the impact of macro-institutions related to the voting system and compulsory voting, controlling for the socio-economic and geographic environment. Finally, they considered the micro-institutional level of administrative measures and their independent effects on electoral participation. At this last stage, they examined whether turnout is higher in countries where registration is compulsory, where it is possible to register on the day of the election, where the government is responsible for taking the initiative to register electors, or where the electoral legislation facilitates the exercise of the right to vote (by allowing voting by mail, by proxy or in advance, and by holding the vote on a holiday).

[8] The initial sample included all 74 democratic countries with populations over 100,000, to which Freedom House had given a highest score of 1 or 2 for political rights in 1996–1997 and that were included in the Massicotte et al. study on electoral legislation (2004). Nine countries had to be excluded because of missing information, and two others. Switzerland and the United States, had to be omitted because their electoral legislation varies across states or cantons.

Table 1 presents the results.[9] They show the relationship between turnout and electoral administration variables once the effects of socio-economic and geographic, as well as macro-institutional, variables have been neutralized. Two results are more directly relevant here. First, the authors find no independent impact of holiday voting. Second, they report a strong effect resulting from administrative measures designed to facilitate voting.

Table 1: Determinants of Voter Turnout: Socio-economic, Geographic and Macro- and Micro-institutional Factors

Independent variables	**Dependent variable:** *Turnout by number of people registered on the lists of electors*	
	OLS Regression coefficient	**(Error)**
Eastern Europe	0.18	(3.85)
Population (log)	-3.34***	(1.22)
DGP per capita (log)	8.28***	(2.93)
Compulsory voting with penalties	13.28***	(2.80)
PR and mixed compensatory	4.20*	(2.19)
Compulsory registration	3.79	(2.45)
Registration on polling day	-4.80	(3.07)
Government initiative	0.85	(2.43)
Holiday voting	-0.26	(2.72)
Easy voting	11.04**	(4.35)
Mali	-33.42***	(11.14)
Constant	55.54***	(13.74)
Number of cases	119	
Adjusted R^2	0.46	

* significant at 0.10 (two-tailed test)

** significant at 0.05 (two-tailed test)

*** significant at 0.01 (two-tailed test)

Source: Blais et al. 2003

[9] All analyses were performed using two different measures of turnout rates: turnout calculated on the basis of number of registered electors and turnout based on the population of voting age as reported in national population censuses. We have more confidence in results using the first measure, because the information is more complete. Thus, we focus here on turnout calculated on the basis of number of registered electors.

However, since a single variable was created (named EASY VOTING), encompassing three administrative measures designed to making voting easier,[10] these findings do not allow us to determine if advance voting as such has an independent effect on turnout. Neither do we know whether having two consecutive regular days of voting makes a difference. Below, we provide a re-analysis of the initial data, which allows us to address these questions directly.

We expand the initial analysis in three ways. First, we look separately at the impact of advance voting on electoral participation. We take apart the variable EASY VOTING and create three more specific measures: PROXY VOTING, ADVANCE VOTING and POSTAL VOTING. Second, we add a new variable, named TWO CONSECUTIVE REGULAR DAYS OF VOTING,[11] to determine whether turnout is higher in countries where there are two consecutive regular days of voting. Finally, we investigate whether turnout is higher in countries where voting takes place on a holiday. We refine the operationalization of the variable in the present analysis.[12]

The new findings are presented in Table 2. In countries where the electoral legislation makes it easier to vote by allowing advance voting, turnout is about 4 percentage points higher than in countries where such an option does not exist. Likewise, the presence of proxy voting enhances electoral participation by about 5 percentage points. Postal voting, on the contrary, does not seem to have a statistically significant effect. We should note that each variable has the predicted positive coefficient but that in all cases the results are not very robust. Advance and proxy voting are significant only at the 10-percent level, while postal voting does not quite reach statistical significance. When we combine the three measures into one, as was done in Table 1, the results are more significant.

[10] Those measures were these: voting by mail, by proxy and in advance. The variable EASY VOTING takes the value of 0 when none of the options is available, 0.33 when only one option is available, 0.66 when two options are available, and 1.00 when all three options are available under the electoral legislation in a given country.

[11] The variable takes the value of 1.00 when election is held on two consecutive days, 0 otherwise.

[12] Initially, the variable HOLIDAY VOTING indicated whether the polling day was a day of rest or a specially declared holiday, as opposed to either a weekday or a weekday and holiday together. In the present study, the variable takes the value of 1.00 whenever holiday voting is an option.

Table 2: Re-analysis of Determinants of Voter Turnout: Socio-economic, Geographic and Macro- and Micro-institutional Factors

Independent variables	Dependent variable: *Turnout by number of people registered on the lists of electors*	
	OLS Regression coefficient	**(Error)**
Eastern Europe	-1.21	(3.95)
Population (log)	-3.55**	(1.35)
DGP per capita (log)	8.68***	(2.96)
Compulsory voting with penalties	12.26***	(2.85)
PR and mixed compensatory	2.81	(2.32)
Compulsory registration	3.70	(2.53)
Registration on polling day	-5.11	(3.10)
Government initiative	1.19	(2.53)
Holiday voting	2.59	(2.93)
Advance voting	3.98*	(2.39)
Postal voting	3.07	(2.49)
Proxy voting	4.89*	(2.73)
Two consecutive regular days of voting	7.39	(5.56)
Mali	-35.89***	(11.52)
Constant	54.27***	(13.74)
Number of cases	119	
Adjusted R^2	0.45	

* significant at 0.10 (two-tailed test)

** significant at 0.05 (two-tailed test)

*** significant at 0.01 (two-tailed test)

The new estimation still reveals no significant impact of holiday voting, though we should note that the coefficient now has the predicted positive sign. The same pattern emerges with respect to two consecutive regular days of voting. We must keep in mind, however, that only six elections (out of 119 in our sample) had two consecutive regular days of voting; such a small number may not be enough to reveal any significant pattern.[13]

In short, this re-analysis of cross-national variations in turnout yields somewhat ambiguous results. On the one hand, each of the three specific variables that are of direct interest here – holiday voting, advance voting, and provisions of two consecutive regular voting days – has the expected positive coefficient, but two of them do not reach the standard levels of statistical significance, and the third is significant only at the 10-percent level. Perhaps a prudent conclusion is that these data suggest that each measure may have a positive impact, but that the impact remains uncertain.

[13] The countries that allow this measure for the period covered in our study are these: Czech Republic, Slovakia and Namibia.

The Canadian Evidence: Who Are Advance Voters?

In ascertaining the effects of expanded opportunities for advance voting, it is important to consider who votes in advance. Two types of variables can be used to distinguish advance voters from those who abstain and from those who choose to vote on election day. First, one can examine *socio-demographic* characteristics, such as age, gender and income. The comparative literature (Highton 1997, Oliver 1996, Patterson and Caldeira 1985, Karp and Banducci 2001, Neeley and Richardson 2001, Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997, Stein 1998) has demonstrated that these factors are often important predictors of the decision both to vote and to vote in advance. Second, one can examine *political* characteristics, such as interest in politics and identification or contact with a political party. Just as with socio-demographic characteristics, the interaction of individuals with the political system has been shown to predict the propensity to vote in advance (Oliver 1996, Karp and Banducci 2001).

It is possible to compare the socio-demographic and political profile of advance voters with those of election day voters and of abstainers. The analyses presented below come from the 2006 Canadian Election Study (CES). The CES polled more than 4,000 Canadians over the course of the 2006 election campaign and re-interviewed more than 3,000 of them after the election. In the last 10 days of the election campaign, the CES asked respondents if they had voted in advance.[14] The analysis below is restricted to those respondents who were interviewed for the first time in the last 10 days of the campaign. We distinguish three groups: those who indicated in the campaign survey that they had voted in advance (advance voters), those who said in the post-election survey that they voted and had not told us that they had voted in advance in the campaign survey (election day voters), and those who answered in the post-election survey that they had not voted (abstainers).

By comparing those who voted in advance with those who voted on election day or did not vote at all, we can ascertain which socio-demographic and political variables are related to the decision to vote in advance. Table 3 shows that a mixture of factors distinguishes advance voters from those who abstain or vote on election day (for a description of the variables, see Appendix C).

- As voters age, their probability of voting in advance rather than voting on election day or abstaining increases.
- As political interest increases, the probability of a citizen voting in advance rather than voting on election day or abstaining increases.
- Compared with those who do not identify with a party, those who do are more likely to vote in advance than abstain.
- Compared with those who are not contacted by a political party, those who are contacted by a party are more likely to vote in advance rather than on election day.

[14] The question asked, "Did you vote in the advance poll?"

The first result suggests that the huge turnout gap between the youngest and oldest generations is unlikely to be reduced by an extension of advanced voting, since it is the oldest citizens who are most prone to take advantage of such measures.[15] The findings concerning political interest and party identification indicate that, so far, the main consequence of easier voting in advance in Canada has been to facilitate things for those who are already integrated into the political process. Whether advance voting is made more available does not matter much for those who do not follow politics. In addition, the findings concerning the relationship between contact with a political party and voting in advance suggest (in line with the findings reported by Oliver in the U.S.) that parties have an important role to play in the mobilization of people to vote in advance. As opportunities for advance voting expand, this mobilizing function of parties could become crucial to realizing gains in participation.

The factors that do not predict voting in advance are as important as the factors that do. We note that those who live in urban settings are no more likely to vote in advance than those who live in rural settings. Moreover, gender, education and income do not distinguish advance voters from the citizens who choose to cast a ballot on election day.[16]

[15] This does not mean that extended advance voting will necessarily have no effect on youth turnout. The implication is that it is unlikely to have a larger effect on youth than it does on older citizens.

[16] Education has an effect when the analysis includes only socio-demographic characteristics. Better educated electors are somewhat more prone to vote in advance, but this is only because they tend to be more interested in politics.

Table 3: Socio-demographic and Political Predictors of Election Day Voting and Advance Voting

Independent variables	Dependent variable: *Choice to abstain, vote on election day, or vote in advance*	
	Regression coefficient	**(Error)**
Comparison group is advance vote.		
Abstain		
Contact with a party	-0.58	(0.36)
Interest in politics	-5.12***	(0.68)
Partisan identification	-0.87**	(0.33)
Age	-0.06***	(0.01)
Female	-0.02	(0.08)
Income	-0.05	(0.06)
Education	-0.05	(0.09)
Urban	-0.03	(0.36)
Constant	6.75***	(1.00)
Election day vote		
Contact with a party	-0.43*	(0.26)
Interest in politics	-0.80	(0.49)
Partisan identification	-0.24	(0.22)
Age	-0.02***	(0.01)
Female	0.06	(0.05)
Income	0.05	(0.04)
Education	-0.05	(0.07)
Urban	-0.28	(0.24)
Constant	4.20***	(0.74)
Number of cases	1,023	

* significant at 0.10 (two-tailed test)

** significant at 0.05 (two-tailed test)

*** significant at 0.01 (two-tailed test)

Note: Missing data are imputed through 10 imputations. Model is multinomial logit.

The Canadian Evidence: Does Increased Advance Voting in an Electoral District Increase Overall Turnout in that District?

Advance voting could increase overall turnout in at least two ways. First, the ability to vote on more than one day increases the ease of voting; citizens have a greater range of options about when they can cast their vote. Electors' cost of voting is reduced, and this should boost turnout. Second, advance voting creates additional opportunities for parties and candidates to mobilize voters. Because voting is extended over a number of days, local campaign organizations are given more opportunities to bring voters to the polls.

One way to ascertain the impact of advance voting is to look at electoral districts and determine whether there is a correlation between advance voting and turnout. However, the relationship between overall turnout and advance voting cannot be determined by just observing their correlation across electoral districts, because the same factors that theoretically increase election day voting should also increase advance voting. For example, electoral districts with higher mean levels of age could be expected to have higher turnout of both types. Similarly, competitive electoral districts should have higher turnout of both types than non-competitive electoral districts. What is needed is a method that controls for these confounding factors. We can hold these factors constant by looking at the relationship between *increases* in advance voting and overall turnout. If greater advance voting causes higher overall turnout, then electoral districts that experienced more advance voting in 2006 than 2004 should also have higher overall turnout.

We perform just such an analysis using data from each electoral district from the 2006 federal election. We examine the relationship between election day turnout in each constituency in the 2006 federal election and three variables:

- the difference in the number of those who voted at advance polls as a share of all voters between 2006 and 2004
- election day turnout in 2004
- the closeness of the race in 2006

All other variables, such as the socio-demographic composition of the constituency, are held constant, since constituency boundaries did not change between 2004 and 2006.

Table 4 presents the results when we regress election day turnout on change in advance voting, controlling for the closeness of the race and election day turnout in 2004. To ascertain the effect of increases in advance voting on overall turnout, we examine the coefficient measuring the impact of advance voting increase.

Table 4: Effects of Increased Advance Voting on Election Day Turnout

Independent variables	Dependent variable: *Election day turnout, 2006*	
	OLS Regression coefficient	**(Error)**
Election day turnout, 2004	0.70***	(0.03)
Advance voting increase, 2006	-0.44***	(0.12)
Margin of victory, 2006	-0.03***	(0.01)
Constant	21.24***	(1.66)
Number of cases	308	
R^2	0.66	

* significant at 0.10 (two-tailed test)

** significant at 0.05 (two-tailed test)

*** significant at 0.01 (two-tailed test)

The results suggest that for every percentage point increase in advance voting in 2006 over 2004, election day turnout was 0.44 percentage points lower, taking into account election day turnout in 2004. Since total turnout is the sum of advance voting turnout plus election day turnout, the implication is a net positive effect of 0.56 percentage points (1 – .44). In other words, an electoral district that went from 5-percent advance voting in 2004 to 10-percent in 2006 is predicted to experience a 2.2-point (5 x .44) decrease in election day voting, but an overall *increase* in total turnout of approximately 2.8 percentage points (5.0 – 2.2). However, the average increase in advance voting was much smaller than this. In 2006, the average electoral district realized an increase in advance voting of 1.3 percentage points, compared with 2004. The overall effect of increased advance voting (between 2004 and 2006) on overall turnout was then, on average, just 0.7 percentage points. While this is a significant effect, it is also a modest one.

Conclusion

Bill C-55 represents a significant change to Canadian electoral law. Indeed, it would make Canada unique in the world in providing for two similar polling days, one of which falling on the Sunday immediately preceding election day. We have tried to ascertain the possible effects of this legislation.

Reviewing cross-national research, we have found that the effects on advance voting and holiday voting are generally inconsistent and ambiguous. While some studies have found that these measures increase turnout, other studies have found no such effect.

We then considered the general evidence on the relationship between convenience and the decision to vote. It is clear that when voting is more convenient, it is undertaken by a greater proportion of the population. However, the effect is modest at best.

Having looked at the existing literature, we re-examined cross-national evidence on the effects of administrative institutional factors on turnout. We found that the provision of advance, postal or proxy voting and the presence of two consecutive regular days of voting were all positively associated with turnout, but that the correlations are not very robust. This suggests that all of these measures may have a positive impact on turnout, but that the effect is somewhat weak and uncertain.

Finally, we turned our attention to original analysis undertaken in Canada. We first used the Canadian Election Study to ascertain the differences between electors who voted in advance and those who chose to vote on election day or not at all. We found that age was a very important predictor of voting in advance, but so was a connection with the political system. Older citizens, those who are more interested in politics, those who identify with a party, and/or those who are contacted by a political party over the course of an election campaign are much more likely to vote in advance. This suggests that the addition of advance voting opportunities will be most likely to increase overall turnout if parties take advantage of the opportunity to mobilize more voters.

Examining rates of electoral participation in Canada's electoral districts in 2006, we found that the districts that experienced an increase in advance voting over the 2004 election also experienced an increase in overall turnout. While this effect was small, it was positive. We can say with confidence that providing greater voting opportunities is not only likely to lead to more advance voting, but also to increased overall turnout.

Taken together, the findings of previous research, as well as the new results presented in this study, suggest that the provisions of Bill C-55 are likely to slightly increase turnout, especially if parties are able to take advantage of the greater opportunities to mobilize voters.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Polling Day and Advance Voting in Selected Countries

Country	Polling Day	Advance Voting
Australia	Polling day takes place on a Saturday.	A pre-poll vote is cast before election day at a pre-poll voting centre. An application to a pre-poll voting officer shall be made on a day, and during the hours, fixed by the Electoral Commission.
Austria	Polling day takes place on a Sunday or other public holiday.	None.
Bahamas	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	Police officer or member of The Royal Bahamas Defence Force may vote at an advanced poll to be held for this purpose at such place as the Parliamentary Commissioner shall determine.
Belgium	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Brazil	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Canada	Each general election must be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following polling day for the last general election, with the first general election after this section comes into force being held on Monday, October 19, 2009.	Between the hours of 12:00 noon and 8:00 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Monday, the 10th, 9th and 7th days, respectively, before polling day.
Denmark	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	Advance voting is available to any voter at any of the 275 national registration offices. Advance voting must take place in the period starting three weeks before election day and ending two weekdays before election day.
Finland	The date of the election is the third Sunday in March.	Advance voting shall begin on the 11th day prior to the polling day and end on the 5th day prior to the polling day. Advance voting does not occur during certain holidays.
France	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.

Country	Polling Day	Advance Voting
Germany	Polling day takes place on a Sunday or on a statutory public holiday.	None.
Greece	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Guyana	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	Advance polls are available to allow members of any disciplined force or forces to exercise their right to vote at an election without affecting their performance of their duties on the election day. Advance polling day shall not be more than 10 days earlier than the election day or later than 5 days before the election day.
Hungary	The general election of members of Parliament is to be held in April or May of the fourth year following the election of the previous Parliament. The president of the Republic chooses the date of the general elections. Polling day has typically been a Sunday – for both rounds.	None.
Ireland	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	Certain islands provide for advance voting and allow the returning officer to hold a poll any day during the five-day period before polling day.
Italy	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Japan	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	Advance voting is possible for the disabled, people who live in remote areas, hospitalized people, and people who wouldn't be able to vote on the designated election day because of their duty or ceremonial occasions or due to their living in a care home. Advance voting can take place at special advance polling centres, starting one day after the election campaign starts and ending on the Friday before polling day.
Korea	Polling day takes place on a Wednesday.	For the convenience of people who cannot vote at their polling station on the election day, such as soldiers, the appropriate Gu/Si/Gun election commission sets up and runs a polling station in which the electors listed on the electoral register for reported

Country	Polling Day	Advance Voting
		absentees may cast their ballot between two and six days before the election day. The absentee polling stations open at 10:00 a.m. and closes at 4:00 p.m.
Lithuania	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	Advance voting is available for a crew member of a ship if the ship leaves a port of the Republic of Lithuania within six days prior to an election and does not enter a port of the Republic of Lithuania on the day of the election, or if there are other circumstances that do not allow a crew member or board passenger to vote in his electoral district or by mail.
Luxembourg	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Malta	Polling day takes place on a Saturday.	No details available.
Mexico	The elections are held the first Sunday of July of the year that corresponds to the election of federal deputies (every three years), senators (every six years) and president of the United Mexican States (every six years).	None.
Namibia	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	No details available.
New Zealand	Polling day takes place on a Saturday.	Advance voting is held in the two and a half weeks before election day. A number of advance voting facilities are available in every electorate.
Norway	Parliamentary elections shall be held in all municipal authority areas on one day in September in the final year of the electoral term of each Storting. Before each election, the king fixes election day on a Monday. A municipal council may resolve that in one or more places in the municipal authority area, polling shall also take place on the Sunday before the official polling	Electors who wish to do so may vote in advance inland from August 10 in the year of the election and on Svalbardand Jan Mayen from July 1 in the year of the election. Advance voting must take place no later than the last Friday before election day.

Country	Polling Day	Advance Voting
	day.	
Poland	The elections of the president and of members of the Sejm and the Senate shall be conducted jointly, on a non-working day – typically on a Sunday.	None.
Portugal	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	No details available..
Saint Lucia	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	Advance voting is available for police officers two days prior to elections.
Spain	Polling day takes place on a Sunday.	None.
Slovenia	Polling takes place on a Sunday or any other holiday.	Voters who will be absent on election day may vote prior to that day, but not earlier than five days and not later than two days prior to election day.
Sweden	Polling day takes place on the third Sunday in September.	A voter who for any reason cannot vote at her or his polling station on election day may vote in advance at a voting place anywhere in Sweden. Advance voting begins 18 days before election day.
Switzerland	Polling day is not specified. Typically, elections are held on Sunday.	The cantons shall permit advance voting on a minimum of two of the four days immediately prior to the polling day.
Trinidad and Tobago	Polling day takes place on a weekday.	No details available.
Turkey	Polling day is the second Sunday of October.	None.

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Appendix B: Polling Day and Advance Voting in Canada

Jurisdictions	Polling Day	Advance Voting
Canada	Each general election must be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following polling day for the last general election, with the first general election after this section comes into force being held on Monday, October 19, 2009. [*Canada Elections Act*, ss. 56.1(2)]	Between the hours of 12:00 noon and 8:00 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Monday, the 10th, 9th and 7th days, respectively, before polling day. [*Canada Elections Act*, ss. 171 (2)]
Newfoundland and Labrador	A general election shall be held on the second Tuesday in October in the fourth calendar year following the polling day at the most recently held general election (October 9, 2007). [*House of Assembly Act*, ss. 3(2)]	On one or more of the seven days immediately preceding the ordinary polling day. [*Elections Act*, ss. 125]
Prince Edward Island	Polling day shall be on a Monday. [*Elections Act*, s. 5(b)]	Between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Saturday the ninth day before ordinary polling day and on Monday the seventh day before ordinary polling day, and at no other time. [*Elections Act*, ss. 82(3)]
Nova Scotia	Polling day shall be on a Tuesday. [*Elections Act*, s. 10(b)]	Between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on the Friday and Saturday before ordinary polling day. A special poll shall be conducted every day except Sunday during that period of time commencing at 12:00 noon on the 12th day before ordinary polling day and ending at 8:00 p.m. on the sixth day before ordinary polling day during such hours of each day as are prescribed. [*Elections Act*, ss. 136, 147(1)]

Jurisdictions	Polling Day	Advance Voting
New Brunswick	A provincial general election shall be held on the following dates: on Monday, September 27, 2010; and thereafter, on the fourth Monday in September in the fourth calendar year following the ordinary polling day for the most recently held provincial general election. [*Legislative Assembly Act,* ss. 2(4)]	Advance polls shall be open at each advance polling station between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. of Saturday and Monday, the ninth and seventh days before the ordinary polling day. [*Elections Act*, ss. 99(4)]
Quebec	The polling shall take place on the fifth Monday following the issue of the order instituting the election if the order is issued on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, or on the sixth Monday if the order is issued on another day. [*Elections Act*, s. 131]	Advance polling stations are open from 9:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the eighth and seventh days before polling day. [*Elections Act*, ss. 301.2]
Ontario	General elections shall be held on the first Thursday in October in the fourth calendar year following polling day in the most recent general election (October 10, 2007). [*Elections Act*, s. 9(2)]	Advance polls shall be held, at an office of the returning officer on the 18th, 17th and 16th days before polling day, if the ballots have been printed; and at an office of the returning officer and at designated other locations on the 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th, 10th, ninth, eighth, seventh and sixth days before polling day. [*Elections Act*, ss. 44(2)]

Jurisdictions	Polling Day	Advance Voting
Manitoba	Polling day shall be a Tuesday that is at least 32 days but not more than 43 days after the date the writ is issued. [*Elections Act*, ss. 49(1)]	An advance voting station must operate in the returning office from the second Sunday before election day to the Saturday before election day, and may operate at other locations specified by the returning officer during the same period. With the exception of a mobile advance voting station, an advance voting station must open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 8:00 p.m. on any day other than Sunday, and must open at 12:00 noon and close at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. [*Elections Act*, s. 125(4)-(5), 125(7)]
Saskatchewan	Polling day shall be 16 days after nomination day. The nomination day shall be a maximum of 17 days and a minimum of 11 days after the date on which the writ is issued. [*Elections Act*, ss. 31(3)]	An advance poll is to be open any five of the seven days before polling day, provided those days do not include a holiday or the last day before polling day. An advance poll is to be open these hours: • if held on a day other than a Saturday or Sunday, from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; • if held on a Saturday or Sunday, from 12:00 noon until 7:00 p.m. [*Elections Act*, ss. 31(3)(d), 132]
Alberta	The 14th day after nomination day shall be the day on which voting is to take place. The nomination day shall be the 14th day after the date of the writ. [*Elections Act*, s. 39(d)]	The polling places for advance polling shall be open from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on each of the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the full week preceding polling day. [*Elections Act*, s. 98(3)]

Jurisdictions	Polling Day	Advance Voting
British Columbia	A general voting day must occur on the second Tuesday in May in the fourth calendar year following the general voting day for the most recently held general election (May 17, 2005). [*Constitution Act*, s. 23(2)]	Advance voting opportunities must be held on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the week before general voting day for an election. [*Elections Act*, ss. 76(1)]
Yukon	The day fixed for holding the poll shall, at any election, be a Monday. [*Elections Act*, s. 221]	Advance polls shall be held on the 23rd and 24th days after the issue of the writ, between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. [*Elections Act*, s. 199]
Northwest Territories	Polling day for a general election must be the first Monday in October in the fourth calendar year following polling day for the last general election. [*Elections and Plebiscites Act*, s. 39(5)]	An advance poll must be open between 12:00 noon and 8 p.m. on Thursday, the 11th day before polling day and may not be open at any other time. [*Elections and Plebiscites Act*, s. 154(1)]
Nunavut	Election day shall be a Monday that is not later than the 35th day after the date of the writ. [*Nunavut Elections Act*, s. 36(4)]	An advance vote must be held on Monday the 7th day before election day. [*Nunavut Elections Act*, ss. 94, 121(4)]

Appendix C: Description of Variables for the Canadian Evidence

Advance/Election day voters – Advance voters are those who indicated in the campaign survey of the Canadian Election Study that they voted in advance during the last 10 days of the election campaign. Election day voters are those who indicated in the post-election survey that they voted. Abstainers are those who indicated in the post-election survey that they did not vote.

Interest in politics – Average of two scales, one measuring interest in politics generally and the other measuring interest in the 2006 election. Question wording was: "Using this scale (0 to 10), how interested are you in politics generally? Zero means no interest at all and 10 means extremely interested." And "Using the same scale, how interested are you in the federal election." Rescaled from 0 to 1.

Party identification – Equals 1 if respondents report a strong or moderately strong identification with any of the federal parties. 0 otherwise.

Contact with a party – equals 0 if respondent has had no contact with a party. Equals 1 if respondent has had contact with a party by phone, email or mail, or in person.

Age – measured in years.

Education – Measures education categories, ranging from no schooling to post-graduate or professional education.

Income – Measures household income categories from $0–20,000 to greater than $100,000.

Election day turnout, 2006 – Share of total electorate that voted on election day in 2006, measured 0–100.

Election day turnout, 2004 – Share of total electorate that voted on election day in 2004, measured 0–100.

Margin of victory, 2006 – percentage point differences between first- and second-place party in 2006.

Advance voting increase, 2006 – Difference between 2006 and 2004 in advance vote turnout as a share of all eligible voters.